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SUBJECT: MALI USES HELICOPTERS TO ATTACK BAHANGA NEAR KIDAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00320

[1](#)B. 07 BAMAKO 00994

[1](#)C. BAMAKO 00299

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) On April 2 Mali attacked Ibrahim Bahanga and his men with two Hind-D helicopters near the village of Alket 25 KM southwest of Kidal. Bahanga took up positions near Alket along the road to Gao on March 31 ostensibly to block the Malian army's ability to resupply Kidal (Ref A).

2.(C) Two rebels were reported killed and four wounded. Several of Bahanga's vehicles were also destroyed. Small arms fire from the ground hit one of the attack helicopters and killed the pilot, who was probably Ukrainian. Witnesses saw smoke billowing from the damaged helicopter, which managed to return to its base in Gao. The damaged helicopter's other pilot was reportedly wounded. Mali purchased two Hind-D helicopters in July 2007.

3.(C) As the helicopter were attacking Bahanga's positions, a military esupply column of up to 40 military vehicles -- which had stopped at the village of Anefis on March 31 to avoid running into the rebels - managed to circumvent Bahanga and reach Kidal. As of the morning of April 3, Bahanga was still positioned along the Gao road, 25 KM southwest of Kidal, and may have mined the rock escarpments near Kidal.

4.(C) Comment: This is the first time Mali has used air power against Bahanga. As the Malian air force and rebels were exchanging fire outside of Kidal, President Amadou Toumani Toure's personal military advisor and three Tuareg representatives were in the process of drafting up a cease-fire agreement in Tripoli. The cease-fire discussions emanating from the negotiators in Tripoli and events on the ground in northern Mali would appear in that case to have fallen out of sync. However, it is also possible that the GOM saw value in reinforcing Kidal before guns were silenced.

In any case the Malian military and government should be pleased that an active engagement with Bahanga finally went their way.

LEONARD